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## **THE ONE HALIBUT PER DAY CHARTER RULE: THE FACTS**

- The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has issued a rule that recreational fishermen buying a spot aboard a charter fishing boat in Alaska's Area 2C be limited to retaining one halibut per day per fisherman. The purpose of the regulation is to keep the charter vessel harvest within its quota, called the Guideline Harvest Level (GHL).
- Over the past 12 years, halibut biomass in Area 2C has declined 58 percent. Over the last four years, the commercial halibut quota has been reduced 54 percent for conservation reasons. The commercial fleet operates under a strictly-regulated Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) system and has not exceeded its quota since the system was implemented in 1995. In stark contrast, the charter allocation was not reduced until last year (per the stair-step formula), and the charter fleet has exceeded its allocation every year since 2004.
- Over the past three years, the charter fleet has exceeded its quota by an average of 55 percent, and last year exceeded its quota by 106 percent. The charter boat fleet opposes NMFS' rule to force the charter fleet to live within its conservation quota.
- The Area 2C charter fleet has strict limits on king salmon (1 per day, maximum 3 per year), yellow-eye rockfish (1 per day, maximum 2 per year), and other species. The new halibut rule allows anglers to keep one halibut of any size per day, with no annual limit.
- When the GHL was established in 2003, it was set at 125 percent of the charter boat halibut harvest. The charter fleet never challenged the GHL. The charter fleet has exceeded its GHL every year – by 22 percent in 2004, 36 percent in 2005, 26 percent in 2006, 34 percent in 2007, and 106 percent in 2008.
- Rather than reduce its harvest and live within its quota, the Area 2C charter boat fleet has continued to overfish. The average catch per active charter boat in Area 2C increased 70 percent over the past decade. The International Pacific Halibut Commission (IPHC) and NMFS have identified overfishing by the charter boat fleet as a conservation threat to the resource.

**Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association • Cordova District Fishermen • Deep Sea Fishermen's Union • Fishing Vessel Owners Association • Halibut Association of North America • Kachemak Bay Fisheries Association • North Pacific Fisheries Association • Petersburg Vessel Owners Association • Sea Food Producers Cooperative • Southeast Alaska Fishermen's Alliance • United Cook Inlet Driftnetters Association • United Fishermen's Marketing Association • United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters Association**

- Because charter boats fish close to shore, their geographically concentrated fishing causes localized depletion. Testimony at the Council's October 2008 meeting documented localized depletion in areas where the charter fleet concentrates, such as the waters near Sitka and Craig. Alaska Department of Fish and Game data confirm local depletions. That data show the charter halibut catch per rod hour has declined by 50 percent near Sitka and by 58 percent near Craig, a clear sign that it is harder for charter clients to catch halibut despite aggressive upgrades in the size and horsepower of charter vessels.
- Localized depletion means subsistence fishermen, who are limited by weather conditions to protected inshore waters, cannot meet their subsistence needs. Testimony at the North Pacific Fishery Management Council's October 2008 meeting documented the problems and hardships subsistence fishermen face because of charter boat overfishing. Subsistence harvest is a priority in Alaska.
- Because the commercial halibut fishery is managed with IFQs, the Area 2C conservation limits have reduced each 2C quota share holders' IFQ by 54 percent from four years ago. This matches almost exactly the 58 percent decline in the halibut exploitable biomass. However, 67 percent of Area 2C commercial halibut fishermen have purchased some or all of their IFQ shares. Banks expect to be repaid regardless of the quota being cut by half.
- Ninety-three percent of the 1,225 commercial halibut fishermen in Area 2C fish halibut on boats less than 60 feet in length. This small boat fleet supports coastal economies in Southeast Alaska's fishery dependent communities. Fifty percent of the Area 2C commercial fishermen are now limited to 3,000 pounds or less of halibut. Many of these small boat family fishermen are facing economic ruin because they have borrowed money, pledging their homes and boats as collateral, to buy IFQ shares allowing them to fish for halibut. Nevertheless, they have supported conservation and accepted quota reductions.
- Fishery scientists, as well as U.S. and international agencies, agree the halibut resource is in a cyclical downturn. They also agree that overfishing by charter boats is hurting the resource. It is neither fair nor equitable that commercial and subsistence fishermen bear the entire conservation burden.
- It is in the best interest of all harvesters – subsistence, unguided sport, longline, and charter – that the halibut resource is managed sustainably over the long-term. If one group of harvesters refuses to conserve the resource, all harvesters are harmed. To quote the final rule to implement the one halibut daily limit: "...a reduction in the charter vessel harvest should leave more halibut in the water to the benefit of all fisheries now and in future years, as well as benefit the health and reproductive potential of the resource." (p. 21199)